

European Eco-Forum's Aarhus Strategy Meeting

Vienna 17 and 18 December 2007

On 17 and 18 December 2007 the European Eco-Forum's Strategy Meeting on the Aarhus Convention took place in Vienna. Around 30 NGOs from the EU, the EECCA countries and South Eastern Europe participated and discussed their strategy for the upcoming third Meeting of the Parties (MoP-3) in Riga/Latvia in June 2008.

Under the item "Review of major developments under the Aarhus Convention and Protocol on PRTRs after MoP-2 (Almaty, 2005) – expectations from the Riga Conference" the Executive Secretary of the Aarhus Secretariat Jeremy Wates gave a key-note speech summarising the latest developments and events of the work of the Secretariat. Furthermore, it was reported on the Long-Term Strategic Plan, the Protocol on PRTRs, the SEA Protocol of the ESPOO Convention, the GMO Amendment and the Compliance Procedure. The slow progress of the ratification of the Protocol on PRTRs and the GMO Amendment were mentioned and it was recognised that more lobby work is needed here. It was also reported on the training on the procedure of the Compliance Committee, which was organised by the European Eco-Forum together with Ökobüro from Austria late November 2007 in Geneva. The training, which also included the attendance of a Compliance Committee session, was very successful and will be continued next year given enough funding is available.

Under the item "Implementation of the Aarhus Convention at National Level" the EEB Secretary General John Hontelez spoke about the project "Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in EU countries" which was conducted by the EEB doing a quick scan and holding a seminar in Brussels. 20 replies were received and published in a small booklet ("How far has the EU Applied the Aarhus Convention", October 2007) which is used for lobby purposes. For more information on the publication and how to receive a copy please visit www.eeb.org.

Furthermore, Serhiy Vykhryst presented an overview of the status of the national implementation reports (NIR). Many members of the European Eco-Forum had been involved in providing information on the status of the reporting process. The deadline for submission to the UNECE was 15 December 2007. Of 40 parties that are due to report it is only known of about 30 that have submitted or still will submit a report. So far NGOs from five countries are considering to develop an alternative report (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Hungary). Any comments on the NIR shall be submitted to the European Eco-Forum by the end of January 2008. Alternative reports should be sent to the Aarhus Secretariat before the end of March 2008 in order to guarantee their timely translation.

On the second day practicalities of the Riga meeting were discussed. Furthermore, the need to nominate candidates for the Compliance Committee was mentioned (deadline for submissions will be end of January 2008).

Furthermore, it was reported on the work of several Task Forces: Access to Justice, Electronic Tools and Public Participation in International Forums (PPIF). Anke Stock from WECF did so for the Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums which is followed by her on a regular basis. The result of the discussion on the work of these Task Forces was that a high priority will be given to the work on the important issue of access to justice and that a new attempt will be started in reviving the work on PPIF.

At the end the Vienna Declaration, which will be laying down the demands of the European Eco-Forum for the MoP-3, was discussed in length and approved. It will be available on this website in due course.